

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, April 3, 2003

**Convened:** 7:04 PM

**Present:** Daniel DeWolfe, James McCaffrey, Donna O'Connor, Clare O'Connor, Francis Russell, John Campbell, Gene Buddenhagen and Charles Giacoppe

**Also present:** Dan Morgado, Michael Hale, Phil Hammond, Thomas Fiore, Maurice DePalo, John Lebeaux, John Scibelli, Mike Gregory, Dr. Anthony Bent, Patrick Collins, Tom Kennedy, Judith Evans, Deborah Peeples, Chris Palumba, Nancy Hochstein, Virginia Winship, Mark Murray, Joseph Zecco and Christopher Kirk

**Presiding:** Daniel DeWolfe

Mr. DeWolfe opened the meeting and asked that the School Department group give its presentation on the FY04 Budget before the Finance Committee reviewed several warrant articles for the Annual Town Meeting.

Ms. Peeples, Mr. Collins and Dr. Bent gave a Power Point presentation giving an overview of the 2002-2003 school year, the school department's FY 04 budget priorities, enrollment trends, FY04 funding sources, allocation of school expenses, cost per pupil figures, the school department's initial budget request and its proposed cuts. Mr. DeWolfe then invited questions from the Finance Committee.

Mr. Giacoppe questioned two line items that had a percentage increase. The first was instructional materials with a 1,000% increase. Mr. Collins explained that the increase included \$43,000 for high school level textbooks. The second increase was a 75% increase in tuition. Mr. Collins explained that tuition was a state function and that we now have to pay the full amount whereas, previously, we only had to pay 50%. Mr. Giacoppe asked about changes in the special education laws. Dr. Bent said that we are still required to provide the "best possible services". Upcoming changes should help decrease costs or slow increases.

Mr. Campbell asked since the school department cut \$180,000 activity fees, had the school department looked at other ways to raise revenue such as increasing adult education fees, adult fees at sporting activities, building rental rates and summer enrichment fees. Dr. Bent explained that we do not have an adult education program and that rental rates have been increased. The other areas were relatively small programs that do not generate much revenue.

Mr. Buddenhagen questioned the large increase in the sick leave buy back line item. Mr. Collins explained the buy back program was a negotiated benefit and that there were more teachers retiring this year to whom the program applied. Mr. Buddenhagen also asked about the 24% increase in Assabet Vocational tuition. Mr. Collins reported that more students enrolled at Assabet and the tuition has gone up.

Clare O'Connor asked about enrollment trends pointing out the difficulty in projecting enrollment at the pre-school level. Dr. Bent explained that with the medical advances that have been made, children with greater special needs are being identified by early intervention programs and showing up in the school system around age three. Ms. O'Connor also asked about hardship cases for school sports. Ms. Peeples stated that if the child received free lunches he or she would also be exempt from sport activity fees.

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Mr. McCaffrey asked about the status of the FY03 budget. Mr. Collins replied it was extremely tight with a surplus of only \$30,000 projected. Mr. McCaffrey also inquired as to the likelihood of receiving grant money. Ms. Evans stated they had been told to assume the entitlement grants would be the same. She also stated that in the long run, they would like to rely less on grant funds.

Mrs. O'Connor excused herself from asking questions due to a conflict of interest.

Mr. Russell asked about the teachers contract. Dr. Bent stated there is money set aside for the contract settlement but that internal adjustments may have to be made.

Mr. Campbell asked about \$40,000 requested for advertising. Mr. Kennedy stated that the opening of a new school in 04 is the reason.

Mr. Buddenhagen stated there is a 15% tax increase this year and that if an override went forward it would be a bad thing and that residents would be upset. Ms. Peeples stated they are not looking for an override this year.

Mr. Giacoppe asked if there were state guidelines for class size and Dr. Bent said there are guidelines but they are not mandated.

Mr. DeWolfe invited questions from the Selectmen. Mr. Fiore replied their questions would be reserved for a future meeting.

There were no other questions at this time so Mr. DeWolfe welcomed the representatives from Shrewsbury Community Services to discuss Article 25.

John Scibelli and Mike Gregory came before the committee. Mr. Scibelli stated that SCS was requested level funding of \$100,000. He explained that their revenue sources were grants, fees and contributions and that cost saving measures had been implemented. The Town's portion was not more than 50% of its operating budget.

Mr. Giacoppe asked how the fee basis works. Mr. Gregory stated that there are low fee, no fee and fee rates and that SCS serves the Shrewsbury public. Mr. Scibelli stated that less than 5% are not Shrewsbury residents but they do work in Shrewsbury.

Mr. Buddenhagen asked about the office rent. Mr. Gregory stated that the current rate is 10 – 15% less than the previous rent.

Clare O'Connor asked if the new office space was suitable for a long term stay. Mr. Gregory stated they have a 5 year lease and hope to stay longer. They kept the location close to the center because that is there the clients come from mainly.

Mr. McCaffrey mentioned that last year it was suggested that SCS become more aggressive in fund raising to become more self-sufficient. That doesn't appear to be the case now. Mr. Scibelli reiterated that not more than 50% of overall budget comes from the Town and that fund raising was subject to the general economy. He stated there has been a general drop off in volunteerism but that they have been applying for more grants. Mr. Gregory stated that if they become self-sufficient it would change the nature of the clinic. He pointed out that private clinics lose money. He stated that revenues haven't kept pace with expenses, SCS couldn't do it without Town money and that level funding is the best goal.

Donna O'Connor stated she felt services should be restricted to Shrewsbury residents and asked

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what would happen if SCS does not get the \$100,000. Mr. Gregory stated that the School Department wanted more highly trained staff and that is what has been done, but if the money isn't received they will have to return to the previous model of using interns. Hours will also have to be cut which will affect the schools and the police department.

The Selectmen had no questions at this time.

Mr. Kirk inquired as to whether it was mandated to have Shrewsbury Community Services. Mr. DeWolfe explained it was strongly recommended by the district court.

There being no further questions Mr. DeWolfe moved on to the next series of articles for the Annual Town Meeting (Articles 10 – 16).

Jack Perreault, Town Engineer, came before the committee to review Articles 10 – 16.

**Article 10:**

Mr. Perreault stated that as subdivisions were completed the associated streets come before Town Meeting for acceptance. Initially, there were 45 streets but now there are 33 with a total of 6.69 miles. This number may be revised and the final list will be available for the April 28<sup>th</sup> Selectmen's meeting. The Planning Board will have reviewed them prior to that Selectmen's meeting.

**Article 11:**

This article asks Town Meeting to accept a parcel of land off South St. in the Fox Farm III subdivision. It was not ready for acceptance last year.

**Article 12:**

This article asks Town Meeting to accept three open space parcels of land in the Prospect Hill subdivision.

**Article 13:**

This article asks Town Meeting to accept a parcel of land in the Stonybrook Farm I subdivision.

**Article 14:**

This article asks Town Meeting to accept certain parcels of land in Ternberry as recreational areas. Mr. Perreault stated that this may not be accepted if the work is not completed in time. Mr. Giacoppe asked if the parcels would be open to all Shrewsbury residents if accepted. Mr. Perreault said yes.

**Article 15:**

This article asks Town Meeting to accept certain parcels of land in the Toblin Hill Estates subdivision. The parcels will be used for open space, playgrounds, a basketball court and retention ponds.

**Article 16:**

This article asks Town Meeting to accept a parcel of land in the Winchester Estates II subdivision. It will be used for retention ponds and have some open space and wetlands.

Mr. DeWolfe requested that maps be available for Town Meeting concerning these articles.

Clare O'Connor asked about liability issues with playgrounds and Mr. Perreault stated that the developers are referred to the Parks and Recreation Department who have the national standards.

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Since some articles may be omitted, Mr. DeWolfe suggested not taking any recommendation votes at this time.

**Article 35:**

Article 35 is a petition article sponsored by Joseph Zecco. Mr. Zecco stated the current by-law allows two unregistered motor vehicles upon private property. He would like to see it reduced to no unregistered motor vehicles but will accept a reduction to one. He has counted 17 such vehicles between Coolidge School and Lake St. and doesn't feel the Town should take on this character. Clare O'Connor asked what other communities do. Mr. Morgado explained Worcester allows one but it must be covered. Other surrounding towns allow one and all have a by-law.

**Article 36:**

Article 36 is a petition article sponsored by a group of Town retirees. John Kehoe, Ernie Tosi, Al St. Onge and Willie Caron came before the committee. Ernie Tosi addressed the committee. He stated that last year Town Meeting accepted section 90A of MGL Chapter 32 raising the retirement allowance of those retired for an accidental disability up to one half of the current salary of the position from which they were retired. Article 36 asks Town Meeting to accept section 90C which would do the same for superannuation retirees who had served Shrewsbury for at least 25 years prior to retiring. Mr. Tosi stated that last years article went through without opposition. He explained that it will take a 2/3's vote at Town Meeting for acceptance. He cited several communities who he had been told had accepted section 90C, among which were Arlington, Holyoke, Lynn, Belmont, Chicopee, Watertown and Lowell. He stated the superannuation retirees were looking for the same privilege granted to the accidental disability retirees last year. He stated that 14 of the possible recipients were 80 years old or older. Mr. DeWolfe thanked the group for attending the meeting.

Mr. Morgado then discussed budget updates mentioning that the Fire Department contract had been settled so that department's salary figures would be revised. He also mentioned adjustments will be made to the Council on Aging and Unclassified budgets. He also stated he is still waiting for the final State budget funding which should be decided by mid May. Gene Buddenhagen and Donna O'Connor had questions regarding residents being able to pay their real estate tax bills. Mr. Morgado would look into it and stated that the motor vehicle excise taxes were being monitored.

Mr. DeWolfe informed the committee of the next meeting to be held on April 10 in Meeting Room B and a joint meeting with the Personnel Board and Selectmen was scheduled for April 14, 2003. Mr. DeWolfe then brought up a letter he received regarding a meeting about the Jordan Pond water quality. Mr. Morgado stated a study had been done by GZA and that the Board of Health has surplus money for the weed treatment. The approximate cost was \$4,500 for the treatment. Mr. Lebeaux explained that the material to be used was an acidifier that locks up the phosphorous from being used by the plants.

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**Donna O'Connor motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Buddenhagen, the motion was so voted 8 – 0.**

Adjourned: 9:35 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Gail A. Sokolowski

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